

Green Power Is Looking Up

BJ's Wholesale Club helps create clean energy with solar panels

BJ's Wholesale Club is doing its part for clean energy. The chain, honored by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) as a 2001 Energy Star Partner of the Year, recently had a solar-electric facility installed on the roof of its store in Deptford, N.J. The solar facility is a cooperative venture between BJ's; Green Mountain Energy Co., Austin, Texas; and Sun Power Electric, Westborough, Mass. Financial support for the installation came from the New Jersey Clean Energy Fund.

"We got involved because we think this is a good opportunity to help promote green energy," says Sara Dill, manager of energy, BJ's Wholesale Club, Natick, Mass. "It gives customers in deregulated states a green-power option."

The 52-kilowatt system, which takes up about 12,000 sq. ft. of BJ's roof space, is made up of 1,330 2-ft. by 4-ft. thin film photovoltaic panels (made by BP Solar, Linthicum, Md.). Green Mountain estimates that the solar-electric panels will generate enough power to reduce carbon-dioxide emissions by 40 tons annually. The electricity generated by the system is sent to a regional power grid.

An electronic display unit, installed at the entrance of the store, features a real-time LED readout of the accumulated carbon-dioxide emissions that the solar panels eliminate.

"The thing about solar power is that nobody knows it's there," Dill says. "It doesn't generate any pollution and there aren't any smokestacks or anything like that. We put the display up to remind people of what's on our roof and that it is generating clean electricity."

The solar facility, called Green Mountain Energy Solar at Southern New Jersey, is owned and operated by Sun Power Electric. BJ's donated its roof space in

return for a slight discount on its electricity. Green Mountain buys the power from Sun Power and then resells it to residential and commercial customers.

In addition to the Deptford location, BJ's has installed solar panels on the roofs of its clubs in Middletown, R.I., Plymouth Meeting, Pa., and North Dartmouth, Mass. The chain is currently looking at additional installations.

"By providing our rooftops as a location for solar-electric generating facili-

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stages of an energy-management program, but once the standard upgrades have been made, the initiative can lose steam.

"It gets harder once you get through those initial upgrades," Dill says. "That's when you have to get people from all departments involved."

To that end, BJ's created a corporate Energy Task Force in 2001.

"The group meets every couple of months with a goal of coming up with new ideas to save energy and the best



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As to the actual solar facility, it has no impact on BJ's existing roof structure. The chain is not involved in its operation.

"We do basic oversight to make sure it is not eroding the roof and that our warranties are still valid," Dill says. "We've had no problems."

BJ's interest in clean energy fits into the chain's ongoing commitment to energy conservation. The chain has upgraded most of the technology in its stores with lighting controls, energy-management systems, and high-efficiency air-conditioning and refrigeration equipment.

Many retailers do well in the initial

way to implement those ideas," Dill says.

In other developments, BJ's expanded its in-house energy-management staff and designated one of its locations as an "Energy Star Club." It plans to use the store to test capital and operational energy-related improvements and evaluate their potential for chainwide expansion.

BJ's was recognized by the EPA in 2001 for its ongoing efforts to make operations, maintenance and design of existing systems as energy-efficient as possible. The low/no-cost improvements saved BJ's more than \$1 million (and 12 million kilowatt hours of electricity) last year.

"We are always on the lookout for new improvements," Dill says. ■